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Media and Democracy: Are Western Concepts of Press Freedom Applicable in New Democracies?

Preliminary remarks

The question of whether Western values are universal or not will not be discussed here (cf. Kunczik, 1997a).¹ The fundamental assumption of Western civilisation since the Sixteenth Century is, according to Daniel Bell (1976: 16), that the social unit of society is not the group but the individual. Concerning human rights I am convinced that they are universally valid. I do not accept the argument that human rights are related to

1 I am quite aware that Harry C. Triandis (1990: 42) has found out that the most important dimension of cultural difference in social behaviour across the diverse cultures of the world is the relative emphasis on individualism versus collectivism. Collectivism means that loyalty to a group (family, tribe, nation) is rated higher than one's own interests. People who live in cultures that differ in this dimension exhibit marked differences in their views of themselves, the views they hold of others and the relationship between the two.

journalism. The effort always to be producing up-to-the-minute news prevents the compilation of news based on careful research and explaining contexts.) Journalists must be aware of the fact that their view of the world, their definitions of events and things, are not the only and absolutely right views. They must be continually aware that other perspectives are possible.

What kind of journalism is adequate for democracy?

Two main concepts of journalism can be distinguished. One is *neutrally-objective journalism*, passively distanced from the events addressed. The opposite is actively involved, participatory, socially engaged, *cause-promoting journalism*. In reality these two normative perceptions by no means rule each other out. A journalist can feel equally committed to objective, neutral reporting and to social engagement. The 'objective' presentation of facts can be quite a strong form of criticism.

Without doubt journalists have power. In fact they are constructing a media reality that can differ sharply from reality. For example the mass media play a decisive role in defining social problems. Thus the problem of violence in families, especially violence against women, has been built up as a social problem by the media in the USA and brought to the attention of a wide public (Tierney, 1982). In this case the relevant institutions (e.g. welfare offices) only responded to this new social problem after it had been defined as such by the media. Another example is the building up of crime waves, for example against elderly people, which took place only in the media. But one must also keep in mind that the

mass media can make certain social problems (e.g. race problems) invisible.

Hans Mathias Kepplinger emphasised an important change in German journalism. Until the mid-1960s most journalists saw themselves as neutral mediators. Since then a growing number regarded themselves as critics who both criticise and consider it their task to give expression to the criticism of others. At the same time the concept of criticism has changed, "in former times a journalist who did not publish a report until he had ascertained its accuracy was considered critical. Nowadays a journalist is regarded as critical if he reports on negative facts or describes them in a negative way" (translation after Meyn, 1994: 154). This development had two important consequences according to Kepplinger, "on the one hand it promoted a negative view of the world. (...) On the other hand it reinforced doubt in the problem-solving capacity of the political and financial system. Those responsible seemed to be less and less in a position to overcome the problems waiting to be tackled." In Germany the developments are not quite positive from the point of view of democracy. Confidence in leading politicians has continually declined. The same is true for the belief that the media report the truth, i.e. are objective.

Day topicality is another important factor influencing the quality of news. News is often not verified before dissemination. Journalists under pressure to produce topical news often overstep the bounds of responsibility. Commercialisation of the mass media also implies sensationalism. Regardless of whether the paparazzi were to blame for the death of Princess Diana in Paris in August 1997, it once again brought the problem of tabloid journalism under public scrutiny.

Public relations and journalism

The influence of public relations on journalists should not be underestimated. The 'classical' perception of the journalist's work could be characterised as follows: on his own initiative the journalist collects information on themes he has to a large extent chosen himself. The informant is more or less passive. It is more than questionable whether this perception is correct. Public relations work (PR) is done by private institutions such as companies and associations as well as by administrations, governments and political parties. PR also tries to influence the mass media. To this end press releases are issued, press conferences are held or events that are interesting and newsworthy to the media are organised. Here the source of information does not remain passive but takes the initiative in addressing the media. Often journalists publish information made available to them. Press releases are often published as they are and reporters often do not bother 'to dig' for stories. PR has developed into an active information producer whose output is increasingly used by journalists. Readers, listeners, viewers—the recipients—cannot recognise the great dependency of media reporting on PR because journalists very rarely reveal it.

PR is also the art of camouflaging and deceiving. Successful PR means that the target group does not note that they have become the victims of PR activity. A lot can be learned from the way American politicians handle journalists. Henry Kissinger was a master at it. He regularly supplied journalists with information. They quoted him as 'a senior State Department official'. The practice of passing on infor-

mation 'off the record', i.e. unattributably and under a pledge of secrecy is widespread in the US and in Europe. This 'necessary evil' can have confidence-building consequences. A symbiotic relationship may form between the source of information and the journalist, so journalists obtain access to otherwise unavailable, confidential information. But journalists have to pay a price: they become dependent on their source. Sigal (1973: 54) emphasises that "dependence combines three elements: some reluctance to offend news sources in the stories they write, considerable willingness to print whatever their source tells them, and little or no insistence that officials take responsibility for the information they pass along." PR knows how to bond journalists. So politicians reward journalists by inviting them to internal information talks; others invite journalists for weekends or organise trips to foreign countries, etc.

From my point of view at least the worst disaster in journalism happened in advance of and during the Gulf War (Kunczik, 1997: 277ff). The PR agency Hill and Knowlton played a major part in the preparations for the Gulf War. This agency received an estimated \$10—\$12 million from the government of Kuwait to represent the Kuwaiti point of view. Hill and Knowlton was quite effective and even used atrocity propaganda. The accusation that Iraqi soldiers had removed 312 babies from incubators had an enormous impact on the American public. In October 1990 the Congressional Human Right's Caucus held a public hearing on conditions in Kuwait under Iraqi occupation. Hill and Knowlton provided witnesses, wrote testimony and coached the witnesses for effectiveness. The agency produced videotapes and presented Nayirah, a 15-year-old Kuwaiti girl. She testified that she was

an eyewitness who had seen soldiers taking babies out of incubators. Later it was discovered that the girl was the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador in Washington. Hill and Knowlton had ensured that the video of the testimony was aired by around 700 TV stations and about 53 million Americans watched the tearful testimony. This atrocity story was used by President Bush, too. Frank Mankiewicz, vice-president of Hill and Knowlton called Kuwait a success for his company.

Commercialisation

In 1917, Lenin wrote that the "press freedom of bourgeois society comprises the freedom of the rich systematically and incessantly to defraud, demoralise and make a fool of the exploited and oppressed masses of the people, the poor" (Kunczik, 1988: 9). This view is by no means restricted to Marxists. The German publisher Paul Sethe saw it similarly, "press freedom is the freedom of 200 rich people to spread their opinions. They will always find journalists who share those opinions" (Kunczik, 1988: 19). American social scientists Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton (1948: 503) wrote, "big business finances the production and distribution of mass media. And, all intent aside, he who pays the piper generally calls the tune." Karl Marx, by the way, succumbed to the un-Marxist illusion that journalism was not carried by economic interest and was a free intellectual activity. In 1842, he wrote in *Debatten über die Pressefreiheit und Publikation der Landständischen Verhandlungen*, "the first freedom of the press consists of its not being a commercial pursuit" (quoted in Kunczik, 1988: 34).

As there are big differences between European media systems, allow me to use Germany as an example. From the beginning, newspapers have been organised on a commercial basis, but the public service broadcasting that was established after the end of World War II in (West) Germany was constructed to prevent misuse of the media by the government or big business. The media were independent, i.e. neither state controlled nor commercial. The public media system is publicly funded and operated on a non-profit basis. The aim is to meet the communication needs of the citizenry. In order to ensure plurality of opinion and balance within the range of programs public broadcasting companies secured internal pluralism via their supervisory bodies which included so-called socially relevant institutions and organisations (like unions, churches, farmers, etc.). The Federal Constitutional Court in 1981 ruled that broadcasting, because of its significance for democracy, could not be left to the free play of forces, "it is up to the legislature to ensure that an overall range of broadcast material is available in which the plurality of opinion which is the hallmark of free democracy can find expression. Care must be taken to ensure that no opinion that is voiced with a view to public consumption is excluded from the process of public opinion-forming and that media in possession of broadcasting frequencies and funds are not in a position to predominate the process of public-opinion forming" (translation: Meyn, 1994: 82).

In 1981, the court judged that external plurality could also be ensured by a large number of providers (like in the market for newspapers) each of which was allowed to present his view as long as there were a large enough number of providers in order to guarantee external pluralism. In 1984, the dual system

of radio and television was introduced in Germany. However, in 1986 the court had already emphasised that there were qualitative differences between the programming of private owned and public broadcasters. The assumption is that commercial media systems are not suited to providing the content necessary for a democratic political system (i.e. high level entertainment and the information necessary for participation in a democracy, etc.). The so-called 'basic supply' (i.e. information, education, culture and entertainment) was the task of public broadcasting. Private corporations were not asked to fulfil similar wide ranges of programming. To repeat: according to the constitutional court broadcasting has to be independent of the state and fulfil the task of providing adequate programming, i.e. supplying the information relevant to participation in democratic decision making, but also high quality programs (culture and education). The main aim of media policy is to guarantee that a plurality of views is expressed.

The development of global media giants endangers the freedom of the media. At least in some cases internal press freedom¹⁰ is endangered. Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation is one of the biggest media enterprises in the world (cf. Kunczik, 1997a: 103ff). The decisive criterion for News Corporation is profitability of investments. Such values as freedom of the press or efforts to offer culturally higher-grade

10 'External' freedom means freedom from intervention by the authorities. 'Internal' press freedom relates to media-internal liberties; i.e. issues of delineating power between publishers and journalistic staff (the owner in Germany has the right to lay down the general, basic policy of a newspaper). Journalistic newcomers voluntarily subscribe to their publisher's fundamental editorial line.

products are meaningless. Mr Murdoch, who intervenes in the editorial activities of his newspapers and claims the right to take full editorial control, remarked, "as proprietor, I'm the one who in the end is responsible for the success or failure of my papers. (...) Since a paper's success or failure depends on its editorial approach, why shouldn't I interfere when I see a way to strengthen the approach." On the quality of his products, mostly sex, crime and human interest, Murdoch says, "I answer to no one but the public. They tell me what they want, and I give it to them. If the public didn't want nudes, I wouldn't go on publishing them. Go complain to the public, not to me." Murdoch is not alone in that. Helmut Thoma, whilst head of the German private television broadcaster RTL, made this point about the quality of programming, "the fish has to like the taste of the worm, the angler doesn't."

But it is a mistake simply to condemn commercial media. Without them 'Watergate' would have been impossible and many, many political scandals (e.g. in Germany) have been uncovered by private media, *Der Spiegel* being the most important and most successful of all. Without such investigative journalism Germany would not have become a stable democracy.

Media and politics

Media are the main source of information about politics. The mass media have the power to set the agenda that also includes the power to define what is important in politics. The consequence is that political parties and politicians have to react to the media, which have the power to set the agenda. Edward L. Bernays, one of the founding fathers of public relations work,

knew how news is selected by journalists.¹¹ Many authors see a deprivation of political power by the media. Information conveyed by the mass media becomes its own reality. In Germany Kepplinger (1983) referred to a change in the function of the mass media. Government's and parliament's access to the public has become largely dependent on the mass media. Hence the mass media have a key role in the political process. They not only criticise and comment on political decisions taken, but prepare for all important decisions by their reporting, thereby defining the terms of reference within which decisions are regarded as acceptable and capable of consensus. Part of the power had passed from the political institutions to the mass media, which have no legitimacy for their co-government. By addressing certain themes (e.g. the environment, armament) the media even prepared the ground for establishment of new political groupings (the 'Greens' in Germany). The less these groupings kept to the established political rules the greater was their news value.

Likewise the opinion forming process within the parties changed because the party leaders made use of the media. Opinion shaping within parties was not happening from the rank and file upwards but from the top downwards. Kepplinger (1983: 61) comes to the conclusion that the mass media, originally rooted outside the political system, have taken a place within it, "they have become a political power which no longer reacts, but acts substantially and, by defining the scope of what is politically possible as a power in their own right, co-govern indirectly." According to this argumen-

11 Bernays (1923: 197) argued, "the counsel on public relations not only knows what news value is, but knowing it, he is in a position to make news happen. He is a creator of events."

tation journalists do not merely control politicians, they have become their competitors for political power. Journalists have one advantage: they hold in their hands the instrument of mass media publicity that is the prerequisite of the politicians' success. The power of journalists is especially problematic if journalistic opinion does not conform to public opinion.

In Germany there is an intensive discussion about the relationship between media and politics. Heinrich Oberreuter (1989) emphasises that there is a "mediatisation of politics", meaning a subjugation of politics to the media. According to Oberreuter politics is becoming a spectacle. Since television is the medium that reaches most of the people there is a preference for information that can be visualised and personalised. Politicians are forced by the media into over-hasty statements and actions. The result is that a gulf emerges between the actions of politicians and their appearance on television. Political planning will develop into communications planning. To paraphrase Patricia Karl (1982), statecraft will become stagecraft. The dominating motive of political action is no longer the substantial quality of policy, but the creation of newsworthy events. Politics is degenerating into show business. Style becomes more important than substance. Personalities in campaigns become more important than political ideas, especially if these are complicated and not easy to report. Intellectuals become disgusted with politics and many turn away, leaving politics to the professional politicians—and that is, at least from my point of view, a development that can endanger democracy.

Under the influence of television the changing of views in politics has changed. In a field-experiment in Germany in 1966/67, Noelle-Neumann (1977) showed that people who

did not read much after buying their first television set formed a different picture of politics and believed that politics is easier than they had thought it to be: that politics is like a Punch and Judy show. To sum up the most relevant research results (e.g. McQuail, 2000: 471f), under the influence of television personalities have become more important than ideas. The attention of the public has changed from the local and regional to the national level. Face-to-face political campaigning has declined. Opinion polls have gained in influence. Political parties adapt to news values in order to get access to the media. Media gatekeepers have the power to determine who will have access to the public. Furthermore 'spin doctors', who manage the public presentation of ideas or personalities, manipulate news. Not forgetting 'tabloidization', i.e. the influence of sensationalist newspapers, is becoming more and more important.

Currently, there is an intensive discussion about the role of journalism in democracy going on worldwide. According to Schudson (1998) journalists should provide news according to what they as a professional group believe citizens should know. In the US there is, under the influence of communitaristic thinking, which gives collective interests priority over individual interests, a discussion about 'civic' or 'public' journalism. James Carey (1999: 17) criticises contemporary tendencies in journalism. He argues that journalism has to take care of its role in democracy because "without the institutions or spirit of democracy journalists are reduced to propagandists or entertainers." Furthermore, Carey emphasises that journalism can be destroyed by forces other than the totalitarian state: it can also be destroyed by the entertainment state, a point that has not yet been discussed: there is no

apolitical entertainment. Entertainment fare stabilises existing power structures because people are 'wasting' time that could be used to analyse the social conditions which are responsible for escapist media use and taking measures to change that situation (cf. Kunczik, 1994: 176ff). For example, the importance of television violence to the stability of US-American society was commented on very cynically by Harold Israel, W. R. Simmons and John P. Robinson (1972: 100), "... the greater appeal of violence over the fare on the television screen may betoken a considerable lessening of feelings of apathy and boredom in the viewing public." The authors call this a "positive social consequence", but the positive consequences consist of the poor and exploited having a false awareness forced on them, making them so passive that they make no more effort whatsoever to change their social situation.

Outlook

Only the surface of the problem of the media and democracy has been scratched, but I think that there is no reason for resignation. It may be that technological innovations like the Internet offer new opportunities for direct democracy. Bill Gates (1995: 3f) writes, "we stand at the brink of another revolution. This one will involve unprecedentedly inexpensive communication; all the computers will join together to communicate with us and for us. Interconnected globally, they will form a network, which is called the information highway. A direct precursor is the present Internet, which is a group of computers joined and exchanging information using current technology." Maybe Bertolt Brecht's vision (1932), already

quoted, will become a reality. One should not forget that democracy is a never ending fight against corruption at all levels of society, against the misuse of power not only in politics, but also in business and organisations like unions, parties, etc., and without journalists engaged in that fight there is no chance, because people in power tend to become corrupt if they are not controlled by the public. The "iron law of oligarchy" is still valid. To the everyday work of journalists this means always having at the back of their mind some wise words uttered in 1780 by the German philosopher Georg C. Lichtenberg, "you cannot carry the torch of truth through a jostling throng of people without singeing someone's beard." To put it another way, without freedom of the press there will be no democracy in the new democracies of the region. However, there are some structural preconditions for press freedom:

1. The media must be completely independent from respective governments.
2. The influence of commercial interests must be controlled or reduced. A situation in which the proprietors publish their point of view as long as the advertisers do not object to it should not develop.

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specific cultural and/or historical spaces. The United Nation's World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 declared that "The universal nature of human rights is beyond question." Cees J. Hamelink (1997: 100) proposes the "victim test": "If anyone is in doubt about the desirability of the universal application of basic human rights, he or she should ask the victims of human rights violations."

Only freedom of information as a human right will be discussed. The principle of "Free Flow of Information" was declared in 1948 in the United Nations Charter, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Article 19 states that 'freedom of information' is a fundamental human right: "Everyone has a right to freedom of opinion and expression; the right includes freedom to hold opinions... and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." The McBride-Commission (1980: 131) stated: "The right to communicate is an extension of the continuing advance toward liberty and democracy." However, many politicians are, without doubt, fierce fighters against press freedom (cf. Kunczik, 1991: 25 lff), in countries that belonged to the former communist block as well, especially the USSR.²

What is democracy?

Democracy is, according to a famous comment by Winston Churchill, a bad form of government but better than all

² In Central Asia censorship is the norm (Mould and Schuster, 1999). Countries like Bjelo-Russia or the Ukraine do not have the reputation of being examples for freedom of the press. In Russia Moscow is a paradise of press freedom compared to the provinces.

others.³ The desirability of 'rule by the people' (the etymology of democracy) is, according to Nick Hewlett (2000: 165), now taken for granted by virtually everyone in the Northern Hemisphere and probably by the vast majority in the Southern Hemisphere. Democracy is associated with concepts like modernism, legitimacy, fairness and other positive values. Democracy is a very vague concept. Ralf Dahrendorf (1990) developed a concept of citizenship, which he defined as a system of rights and entitlements that embrace the whole of society. Citizenship includes three basic rights: a.) justice and equality; b.) basic political rights; c.) elementary social rights. Democracy means the rule of law, the right of voting and free expression and "the right not to fall below a certain level of income, and the right to education."

Democracy and journalism—the Marxist point of view

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels discussed the role of journalism for democracy (cf. Kunczik, 1988: 73). On May 15, 1842 Marx wrote of the negative consequences of press

3 Quoted in: Browning et al. (2000: 175). Churchill also said (quoted in: Gilbert, 1991: 802): "The foundation of all democracy is that the people have the right to vote. To deprive them of that right is to make a mockery of all the high-sounding phrases which are so often used. At the bottom of all the tributes paid to democracy is the little man, walking into the little booth, with a little pencil, making a little cross on a little bit of paper. No amount of rhetoric or voluminous discussion can possibly palliate the overwhelming importance of that point. The people have the right to choose representatives in accordance with their wishes and feelings."

censorship that "the censored press has a demoralising effect. It is potentiated evil, from which hypocrisy is inseparable, and from this fundamental evil flow all its other weaknesses. The government hears only its own voice, it knows that it hears only its own voice, and yet fixes itself in the delusion it is hearing the voice of the people and demands of the people that they, too, affix to this delusion. But the people for their part sink into political superstition, partly into disbelief, or, totally turn away from state life, become private rabble. By having to regard free writing as lawless, they get used to regarding the lawless as free, freedom as lawless. This is how censorship kills the spirit of state." Marx took the view that where there was no press freedom, all other freedoms would become illusory. Communist press policy in the former communist states (like the U.S.S.R. or the GDR) cannot be claimed to have been in the spirit of Marx, who was still wholly in the tradition of the time running up to the 1848 German Revolution. Press freedom was equated with the freedom of the state. The political press in particular was expression of the people's voice vis-à-vis the government.

In a letter to August Bebel, dated November 19, 1882, Engels pleaded vehemently against any restriction of press freedom even within the Workers' Party. "You simply must have a press in the party which is not directly dependent on the executive and the party congress, i.e. which is able within the programme and the accepted tactic to oppose without fear individual party steps and within the limits of party decency, also freely to expose to criticism the programme and the tactics. You as the party executive should foster such a press, indeed bring it into being, then you will still have more moral influence over it than if it comes into being against your will."

Thus for Marx and Engels journalism, apart from its function as critic of society as a whole and representation of the interests of the people vis-à-vis the government, also has the function of internal party criticism. Marx could not imagine that the transition from capitalism to socialism could go hand in glove with reduction of the freedoms that the young revolutionary citizenry had helped assert against feudal rule and bureaucratic absolutism. The role of journalism in socialism as it existed in reality is absolutely irreconcilable with the ideas of Marx and Engels who were both convinced fighters for the freedom of the press.

Democracy and journalism—historical aspects

The history of the press in Western Europe and North America is a history of the struggle for press freedom. Very soon after Gutenberg invented the printing press, censorship measures were institutionalised. In 1482, the first censorship edicts were issued by the Catholic Church because of anti-clerical and other critical pamphlets being published. In 1559 the first papal index appeared which banned, not only the production, but also the reading of certain writings (especially those of Martin Luther). The legitimacy of censorship of newspapers was not fundamentally challenged until into the Eighteenth Century. Rather, theorists of the absolute state legitimated censorship by reason of the state.⁴ The consequence of censor-

4. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) argued in his *Leviathan* (1651) that mankind must be regarded as being in a state of "war of all against all." The most basic motive of man, according to Hobbes, is the "the desire of power after power that ceaseth only in death."

ship, for example in Germany, was that home-political news was banned or its circulation greatly constrained.

The struggle for freedom of the press from state influence began in Britain where in 1649 the 'Levellers' petitioned parliament stating the following: "If a government wants to act justly and in accordance with the constitutional principles then it will be necessary for it to hear all voices and all opinions. But that is possible only if one grants freedom of the press." Outstanding in this context was the treatise *Areopagica* by John Milton, which centred on freedom of the press. Milton demonstrated the impossibility of gapless censorship, which would lead only to the suppression of the truth. Censorship would make it impossible to find the truth by public argumentation. Truth could be found only if one considered the possibility that others could also be right. In argument and counter-argument, so one thought, one would arrive at the truth. From 1688 the British parliament was the supreme authority for controlling the press. Censorship ceased in 1695 when it was decided not to renew the so-called 'Licensing Act'. The American (1776) and French (1789) declarations of human rights proclaimed freedom of the press, added in 1791 as the First Amendment to the American constitution.

In Germany the road to press freedom was harder and more difficult. The wars of liberation (*Befreiungskriege* 1813–1815), the fight against Napoleon, were connected with a struggle for press freedom. The 1819 German ministerial assembly brought back pre-publication censorship (*Karlsbader Beschlüsse*) which stayed in force until the revolutionary year of 1848. The Reich Press Act of 1874 only formally lifted state hindrance of the press. Censorship remained the usual prac-

tice. It was not until the Weimar Republic (1919–1933) that freedom to express opinions counted as one of the basic rules.

In 1949, after the end of World War II, the Basic Law (constitution) of the Federal Republic guaranteed freedom of the press again. According to a judgement of the Federal Constitutional Court, the country's highest, a free press, not controlled by the state and subject to no censorship, is a fundamental element of a free state; a free regularly appearing press is indispensable to modern democracy.⁵ However, press freedom has never been limitless; the journalist's special responsibility to society has always been discussed. Article 5 of the German Basic Law says, "Everyone has the right to express and disseminate his opinion freely in speech, writing and images and to inform himself without let or hindrance from generally accessible sources. Freedom of the press and freedom to report by radio and film are guaranteed. There shall be no censorship." But article 5 continues, "These rights are limited by the provisions of general laws, the legal requirements governing the protection of young people and the right to personal honour."

In the Eastern Part of Germany (the German Democratic Republic/GDR), there was a different development. The communists took power—and communism and press freedom is like fire and water; they cannot co-exist. The journalist's

5 For example, in 1958 the court argued in a verdict as follows: "The basic right to free statement of opinion is, as the most direct expression of the human personality in society, one of the noblest of all human rights (...) For a liberal democratic system of government it is absolutely fundamental because only it permits the continuous intellectual debate, the battle of opinion that is the life-blood of such a system. In a certain sense it is the basis for all freedom..." (translation: Meyn, 1994: 6).

main task was to build socialist consciousness by partiality in the selection and presentation of news. The mass media published only what served one's own cause. The political opponent gets no say. The association of East German journalists regarded itself as a "fighting unit on the ideological front of socialism" and as "a reliable fighter alongside the party of the working class and our socialist state."

The main problem these journalistic fighters had to fight with was another one. Nobody believed them, they were not credible. The people had access to the West German media (especially radio and television). And you can hide some of the news for a short time but you cannot hide all the news all the time. And then came Gorbachev and the "*glasnost*" (openness) which took conservative communist GDR leadership by surprise. The revolution took place in the name of democracy. The rallying-cry of the Leipzig-revolutionaries became famous—"We are the people." Without doubt the Western media (especially television, which could be received in nearly the whole GDR) played a central role—although it is impossible to quantify the influence of the media exactly. The people got information about the weakness of their state. The result is well known: the GDR broke down. To quote the famous sociologist and historian Eric Hobsbawm (1995: 256), "there are historic moments which may be recognised, even by contemporaries, as marking the end of an age. The years around 1990 clearly were such a secular turning-point."

Media and democracy: normative theories

In their still influential book "Four theories of the press" Siebert, Schramm and Peterson developed normative views on how the mass media function in different types of society. Their basic assumption was that the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates. The purportedly oldest press theory, the authoritarian theory, dates from the Sixteenth Century. It derived from the philosophy of absolutism. Publishers were controlled by patents, licensing and censorship. Siebert et al (1956: 3) wrote, "this concept set the original pattern for most of the national press systems of the world, and still persists." A libertarian theory of the press dominated in the Nineteenth Century. The press was seen as "The Fourth Estate"—free of government influence and controls. John Milton's notion of the "self-rightening process", of the "free market place of ideas", is of central importance to this press theory, formulated most clearly in the First Amendment to the American Constitution.

In 1947 a report of the US Commission on Freedom of the Press formulated the third theory, the theory of the social responsibility of the press (Hutchins 1947). This theory responds to the recognition that one had hoped in vain for self-regulation and self-control of the media market. The double function of private enterprise mass media, to make profits and to serve their advertisers versus serving the public, was met only one-sidedly. As a rule the public got the worst of the bargain. The report was critical of the press for it gave no adequate voice to those not belonging to the small and powerful elite. Siebert et al (1956: 95) write, "Social responsi-

bility theory holds that the government must not merely allow freedom; it must actively promote it... When necessary, therefore, the government should act to protect the freedom of its citizens." William Hocking, a member of the commission, wrote (1947: 169), "inseparable from the right of the press to be free has been the right of the people to have a free press." The press, which enjoys a privileged position, was seen as obliged to be responsible for society in carrying out essential functions for society (Siebert et al, 1956: 74). Six functions were postulated. Among the main functions were: 1.) To serve the political system by making information, discussion and consideration of public affairs generally accessible; 2.) To inform the public to enable it to take self-determined action; 3.) To protect the rights of the individual by acting as a watchdog over the government.⁶ The main idea was that the mass media should compete in a free market place of ideas, so that people could read (or listen) to opposing viewpoints on politics and all other controversial issues. The media should not be allowed to develop into a monopoly. People should have the chance to make a choice between different points of view and decide for themselves. You cannot have a free press if it behaves irresponsibly. The issue of professional ethics and, linked with it, continuous reflection on the impact journalists make with their work must become central to journalistic training (on ethics in journalism cf. Kunczik, 1999).

6 The other three functions were: 4. To serve the economic system, e.g. bringing together buyers and sellers through the medium of advertising. 5. To provide entertainment (by which only 'good' entertainment is meant, whatever that may be). 6. To preserve financial autonomy in order not to become dependent on special interests and influences.

Dennis McQuail (1983) proposed another normative theory because dissatisfaction with established media had found expression in completely different forms of communication. The democratic-participant theory takes into account that many ideas are expressed via alternative, grass-roots media. In the 1960s and 1970s the pressure for local and community radio and television are examples for the theory which challenges the dominance of centralised and commercialised or state-owned mass media. The theory favours multiplicity, smallness of scale, locality, de-institutionalisation, and interchange of sender-receiver roles, horizontality of communication links.⁷ Basically speaking, it amounts to a revival of the radio utopia of Bertolt Brecht (1932), where radio must be turned from a distribution apparatus into a communication apparatus. Radio should no longer isolate listeners, but organise them as suppliers.

The iron law of oligarchy

Robert Michels developed in *Sociology of the Party System* (1925) the "iron law of oligarchy", which is one of the empirically best backed-up laws in the sociology of organisations. According to the "iron law" it is the destiny of all organisations to develop a hierarchical structure. By oligarchy Michels means domination by the few. This clique of few individuals is formed of necessity into large organisations. It

7 James Curran in 1996 developed the concept of "civic media" which include many often very small media which are not run for profit but are oriented to a variety of causes in the public sphere (e.g. environmentalists, minorities, feminists, etc.).

forms because only a minority takes an active part in party or public life and because the large number of persons makes communication among all impossible. So strategic cadres must be created—small nuclei within the organisation or the state, a few persons who collect information and pass it on. The holders of these strategic positions have a tendency to come to regard themselves as benefices. These strategically favoured staff members turn into career officials who have the possibility of manipulating information and engaging the entire communication system in achieving their aims. Michels took the view that if even within the political parties democracy is impossible then it is certainly out for society as a whole.⁸

Not that the domination by the few necessarily means the oppression of the many. For the few, after all, can only be led by the interest of the many. This argument, too, is considered by Michels. He observes that leaders who take power themselves become part of the elite whose main interest is in staying in power.⁹ At the same time, in Michels' view, the personality of the leader undergoes a psychic metamorphosis: ultimately the leader himself thinks of himself as a unique and splendid person—one that the organisation is to serve. It does not matter under which slogan a revolutionary party comes to power: the organisation always ends in domination by the few. Always, as the British author George Orwell was to formulate it later, some are more equal than others.

8 For himself, personally, Michels drew the consequences by changing from convinced Social Democrat to enthusiastic adherent of the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini.

9 On diversity of attitudes among rank and file, and on the discrepancy between the beliefs of the leaders of a movement and the beliefs of the followers see: e.g. Marx and Wood (1975: 383f).

What is the consequence of Michels' argument for the discussion of the relationship between media and democracy? Freedom of speech and freedom of the media must be fought over again and again and always be defended. Germany and all other European countries have experienced that the powerful in politics and business do not want their affairs critically observed by the media and so find themselves under public scrutiny. Corruption and abuse of power happen everywhere, all the time, and fighting them in order to save democracy is a task central of good journalism. (Incidentally, the profession of public relations counsellor developed in the US at the beginning of the Twentieth Century because big business wanted to counter the influence of the so-called 'muck-rakers'.)

Ethical aspects and main tasks of journalism in processes of democratization (democratic journalism)

The starting point for developing ethical foundations for what I call democratic journalism is the following basic conflict situation: "In all organisations, but especially in the states, the problem of government is twofold. From the point of view of the government, the problem is to secure acquiescence from the governed; from the point of view of the governed, the problem is to make the government take account, not only of its own interests, but also of the interests of those over whom it has power" (Russell, 1957: 187f). The attempt is frequently made to argue this fundamental conflict of interest away. Those in power always try to give the impression that they are representing the interests of the entire population.

They claim that the official ideology on which the state is based rests on a fundamental harmony of the interests of the entire population. It is obvious that purely affirmative, eulogising reporting, which ritually extols the supposed outstanding achievements of whoever is in power is not democratic journalism. In a democracy journalism always has to take a fundamentally critical position. This is not the same as rejecting one's state, but it is to function as a watchdog.

My further argumentation is based on the assumption (which unfortunately is rarely found in reality) that the governments concerned are interested in having well-informed and self-assured citizens actively participating in forming public opinion and political will—and at the same time having a strong interest in controlling the government to expose and fight the abuse of power and corruption. Under no circumstances is it the task of democratic journalism to manipulate the population and to support regimes that scorn human rights. In principle, the so-called 'government-say-so journalism' is irreconcilable with an ethically based journalism, but the dissemination of decisions by the executive, the legislative and the courts is also of central importance to democratic will-building.

Participation of the people is most important, since the more widespread a person's participation in collective decision making and the greater their integration into the communication structure, the higher is the commitment to the nation state (positive affect, loyalty, and efforts to realise goals), and the lower the detachment (personal remoteness and feelings of inability to influence collective actions and policies). Against this background one of the most important tasks of democratic journalism (and probably the least realised) is to

help prevent establishment of oligarchic leadership that is fundamentally harmful to the development of democracy. Democratic journalism has the task of clarifying political will-building processes—politics must be made transparent.

Democratic journalism bases on a philosophy that puts human dignity at the centre of all things. If journalistic ethos treats communication as an activity aimed at producing understanding between people then it will also be accepted that citizens expect the media to inform them appropriately about public affairs. No democratic journalist must withdraw to the position that the imparting of 'facts' could be the only object of journalistic activity. Journalists should always have the following saying of Dorothy Sayers in their minds: "My lord, facts are like cows. If you look them in the face hard enough, they generally run away."

Social change, even planned social change, always involves conflict. There is always the great possibility that some parts of society will lose and some will win. But conflicts must not only be seen negatively. Conflicts also prevent stagnation and create awareness of problems, which can ultimately lead to their solution. As a rule, states in which the mass media spread the image of a vast harmony of interests are always authoritarian states in which opinions deviating from those of the government are suppressed. One of the important tasks of journalism is to point out alternatives and to show that depending on the various positions within a society there are different priorities in objectives. Thus something which appears especially valuable and important from a local point of view (local rationality) might be quite negative from the point of view of the overall system. Providing credible information in such situations of conflict is the task of journalism.

Fulfilling the function of a watchdog and evaluating the performance of politicians means that almost automatically there are going to be conflicts between journalists on the one side and politicians and administrators on the other side. Journalists must be continuously aware that information affects power in society. Democratic journalism can never be a neutral, non-participating factor. Quite the contrary, it must be recognised that journalism is a power factor perceived as a challenger by many politicians and other vested interests. Only in a dictatorship is there no conflict between journalists and government.

Democratic journalists should perceive themselves as intellectuals, as members of a profession doing intellectual work. That involves assuming a fundamental critical perspective when social reality is judged. To put it more plainly: journalists should not sell their souls to the powerful and only glorify them. They have an extremely important obligation to society as a whole, the task of exercising criticism on the basis of fundamental human values. And journalists must be clear from the start that it is almost the norm for such intellectuals to be attacked and calumniated as traitors to the national cause, a riffraff without an ethos and so on. Democratic journalism is by no means hostile to the state. Criticism is not, after all, destructive, it can be very positive. Hence democratic journalism must possess a marked responsibility ethic. It must take into account the possible consequences in society of what it publishes. Here we get to the problem of where to draw the line, which can be a most difficult situation in any given case. But whenever human rights are violated, the journalist must act as an absolute-value ethicist regardless of the consequences. This unequivocal duty to the truth where human

rights are scorned is what distinguishes democratic journalism from government-say-so journalism.

A positively critical stance vis-à-vis the state and politics is control without being in opposition; this turns into absolute resistance should human rights be violated. The unequivocal answer to the question 'Whose side am I on?' must be 'On the side of humanity'. To cite Nobel Prize winning author Camilo Jos Cela who said in an interview (*TIME*, December 11, 1989: 46), "I am not on the side of those who make history but of those who suffer history."

Journalists must know that they wield great power as constructors of reality and that in this they are vulnerable to a great danger, that is the inclination to allow only those things to become 'news' which correspond to their own prejudgement and to synchronise news and opinion. When journalists deal with conflicts, controversial issues and so on, they tend to report mainly those aspects, which support their own conflict-view. Walter Lippman's famous sentence is still valid (1922: 81), "for the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see."

For that very reason producing multiplicity of opinion also means paying attention to heterogeneity of journalism, i.e. journalists should come from the broadest possible variety of social backgrounds. Every journalist should know that news values, i.e. the criteria by which items of information are selected for distribution as news, are not static and absolute, but deeply rooted in the production conditions of mass communication, which depend on who controls a society's media. In other words, news values can and should be changed. (The rule that good news coverage is synonymous with topical news coverage should not apply to democratic